

6. BROAD-BILLED SANDPIPER *LIMICOLA FALCINELLUS*: AN ADDITION TO THE AVIFAUNA OF INDIA'S WESTERN SEABOARD, SOUTH OF JAMNAGAR AREA

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The tide was coming in at 1000 hrs on November 29, 2008, at the Sewri waterfront leaving only a football sized area in front of the Colgate factory above water. The muddy area was packed with small waders of all types, i.e., stints, plovers, sandpipers. As I scanned the area with my spotting scope (85 mm objective and 40x eyepiece) I noticed two birds, one of which I identified positively as a Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* and another which looked like a smaller version of the Curlew Sandpiper. Both the birds were feeding actively and with almost identical pecking action. On continued observation it was evident that the smaller bird was a different species, probably a Dunlin *Calidris alpina* or a Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*, the latter having never been identified positively by me before. I saw numerous such pairs cross my field of view through the spotting scope. Viewed with binoculars (8 x 40) I could see the smaller version of the Curlew Sandpiper spread over a large area, numbering several dozens, but impossible to judge accurately, given the high density of small waders moving and feeding actively before the tide submerged the remaining visible ground.

The terminal kink in the bill was well-appreciated in profile, as also its prominent white supercilium; the split supercilium could not be appreciated in the field as it was camouflaged by the apparent striped pattern of the crown. The split supercilium was clearly evident in the images captured, when viewed magnified. A streaked breast band was present. The belly and flanks were white.

The Broad-billed Sandpiper has not been reported in literature or documented from Mumbai (Varma *et al.* 2004) or Maharashtra in the recent past. Some authors consider

it as an occasional winter passage migrant (Grimmett *et al.* 1999; Kazmierczak and van Perlo 2006) while others list it as a winter visitor (Hayman *et al.* 1986; Rasmussen and Anderton 2005) along the entire western seaboard. Search of the ENVIS database showed two reports of sightings from different parts of India (Balachandran and Natarajan 1997; Sangha and Kulshretha 2004). The OBI (orientalbirdimages.org) database had images of the bird from Jamnagar. The migratory pattern of this bird is also not well understood (Gavrilo *et al.* 1995).

An interesting finding of site fidelity (Balachandran and Natarajan 1997) among this species mandates a more thorough search for this bird in Sewri and other suitable nearby sites in late November and early December. This will also help settle the question whether this species is a passage migrant or a winter visitor to Mumbai and India's western seaboard or a combination thereof.

Possible reasons for the scarcity of reports of its sighting are: 1) low degree of awareness / suspicion 2) difficulty in field identification 3) low number of birds 4) visits of a nature of passage migrants rather than winter residents 5) confusion with other species of small waders 6) Paucity of observers and suitable photo documentation equipment.

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